

Message Text

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ACTION EA-13

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 6178

LIMDIS

FROM AMBASSADOR SNEIDER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR MASS KS US

SUBJECT: ROKG FIGHTER AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT

REF: SEOUL 6103

1. I HAVE REVIEWED THE REFERENCED MESSAGE OUTLINING THE PROPOSED DIRECTION OF FUTURE ROK FIGHTER AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT. I AGREE FULLY WITH RATIONALE AND RECOMMENDATIONS MADE THAT MESSAGE AND WOULD URGE AN IMMEDIATE, FAVORABLE WASHINGTON DECISION.

2. I REALIZE THE VERY REAL COMPLICATING PROBLEMS WHICH WASHINGTON AGENCIES FACE. HOWEVER, UNTIL NOW NEITHER US NOR ROK AGENCIES HAVE HAD CLEAR AND AGREED IDEA AS TO FUTURE ROK AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT. THE PROPOSED PROGRAM CONTAINED REFTEL FINALLY PUTS THE FUTURE KOREAN AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT PICTURE INTO A PATTERN WHICH IS SENSIBLE AND WHICH GIVES A REASONABLE BASIS FOR FUTURE PLANNING ON BOTH SIDES.

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3. EARLY ACTION ON OUR RECOMMENDATIONS WOULD KEEP THE KOREANS CLOSELY IN STEP WITH US AND ALLOW US TO FINALLY TURN OFF VARIOUS AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT PROPOSALS NOW FLOATING AROUND WHICH ARE NOT IN KOREA'S INTERESTS OR OUR OWN. IN ADDITION, WE WOULD BE IN A POSITION OF FIRMLY CLOSING THE DOOR TO ANY EVENTUAL KOREAN INTEREST IN MAJOR THIRD COUNTRY AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT. (IF WE CONTINUE TO DELAY INORDINATELY IN RESPONDING TO THE KOREANS, ROKG WILL EVENTUALLY BEGIN TO LOOK ELSEWHERE FOR AT LEAST SOME OF THEIR AIRCRAFT NEEDS).

4. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN WE HAVE A PRESSING POLITICAL NEED TO REACT POSITIVELY IN MAJOR AREA OF CONCERN AT THE SCM. THE NEWS ON FUTURE SECURITY ASSISTANCE LEVELS PROMISES TO BE DISCOURAGING IN TERMS OF MOD PLAN GOALS. THE ROK REACTION WILL BE HIGHLY NEGATIVE, IF AT THE SAME TIME WE ARE COMPLETELY UNRESPONSIVE TO THEIR LEGITIMATE INTEREST IN AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT, INVOLVING AS IT DOES USE OF THEIR OWN FUNDS, AT VERY TIME WHEN US MAP GRANT IS DECLINING SHARPLY. (IN THAT CONTEXT THE USG DECISION ON THE BAILED SQUADRON IS CRUCIAL.)

5. IN BROADER POLICY TERMS, THE ROKG WOULD INTERPRET LACK OF RESPONSIVENESS ON THIS PROGRAM AS A CLEAR SIGNAL OF DIMINISHED US INTEREST IN KOREA. INEVITABLY THIS WOULD CREATE A SERIOUS POINT OF FRICTION IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS AND CONTRIBUTE TO WHAT IS ALREADY A MOOD OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OUR COMMITMENT AND US-ROK RELATIONSHIPS. THIS WOULD REACH INTO THE BLUE HOUSE ITSELF, SINCE PRESIDENT PARK HAS ACCEPTED, AND IS NOW PERSONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH, THE ROK AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT PROGRAM OUTLINED IN REFTTEL. WE CAN EXPECT THAT HIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS US ON SECURITY MATTERS AND OTHER ISSUES OF MAJOR INTEREST TO BE STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY OUR HANDLING OF THIS PROBLEM. MORE BROADLY WE WILL BE ADDING TO THE POLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES ALREADY FACING THE ROK IN THE WAKE OF ITS CURRENT CRISIS WITH JAPAN.
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